Influenza, or flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza A and B viruses. The ability of these viruses to spread from one person to another results in seasonal flu epidemics every year. The timing, severity, and length of each flu season differs, making them quite unpredictable. The influenza virus can cause mild to severe illness and sometimes even death. Older people, young children, pregnant women, and people with preexisting medical conditions are most at risk for complications like bacterial pneumonia and dehydration. Getting the flu vaccine each year is the best way to prevent infection.

**Certain precautions can be taken to protect yourself and others from the flu:**

- **Get vaccinated.** *The flu vaccine will protect you from the three most common flu viruses. The 2010-2011 vaccine will contain protection against the 2009 H1N1 virus. It is available in two forms: a flu shot and a nasal spray flu vaccine.*

- **Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze and be sure to throw it away after it has been used.**

- **Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.**

- **Avoid touching your nose, mouth, or eyes.**

- **If you get sick with a flu-like illness, stay home from work and school and avoid contact with others so the virus does not spread.**

- **Avoid holding, hugging, kissing, or shaking hands with anyone who has the flu.**

- **Disinfect things that are touched often like door handles, telephones, and computer keyboards.**
Flu FAQs:

- **What are the symptoms of the flu?** The most common symptoms are fever or chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, and fatigue. Some people may also experience vomiting or diarrhea.

- **What is the difference between the flu and the common cold?** Although both have similar symptoms, they are caused by different viruses. Colds tend to be milder and are more likely to cause a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious complications.

- **When is the flu season?** The flu season varies each year but in the United States, the peak usually occurs between late November and March.

- **How does the flu spread?** Flu viruses are mainly spread from person to person when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes. The virus can also be transmitted when someone touches an object that has respiratory droplets containing the flu virus on it and then goes on to touch their own mouth or nose without washing their hands first.

- **If I got the flu last year, will I have immunity against it this year?** Previous infections will provide some immunity against closely related strains of the flu virus. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are many different types of influenza viruses and these viruses are also constantly changing. Antibodies from prior infections will not be as effective against new strains.

- **How do I find out if I have the flu?** The doctor can perform a test to determine if you are infected with the flu virus as long as the test is performed within two to three days after symptoms first arise.

- **How long is an infected person contagious?** In general, healthy adults are contagious from 1 day prior to showing symptoms to 5-7 days after. This period may be longer in young children or people with weakened immune systems.

- **Is the flu treatable?** Yes. Your doctor can prescribe antiviral drugs (in the form of pills, liquid, or inhaled powder) to combat the flu. These drugs are different from antibiotics. Because the flu is caused by a virus and not bacteria, antibiotics are not effective against the flu.

For additional information about H1N1 2009 please visit:

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/